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Barry Elsey

University of South Australia, barry.elsey@adelaide.edu.au

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THE DOCTORAL LEARNING JOURNEY AND OUTCOMES FOR BUSINESS LEADERS AND CORPORATE MANAGERS

Barry Elsey, *University of South Australia*

Introduction: Background to the Research

International education is big business in Australia and the University of South Australia (UniSA) is a leading player, particularly in the Asia Pacific region (Ciccarelli, 2007). Forced by government to generate income beyond public subsidy Australian universities have had little choice but to enter the competitive private sector marketplace offshore to attract international students. In the case of UniSA special attention has been paid to marketing offshore 'executive' doctoral programs for those in leadership roles in business and corporate affairs. These business and corporate leaders drawn to these doctoral programs is the subject of this paper.

When provision began in the Asian business and commercial hubs of Hong Kong and Singapore in the early 1990s, first with a traditional Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) executive program, there was a pent up demand. The university was stretched to supply suitably experienced doctoral supervisors, which had to be expensively sourced from faraway countries such as the UK and USA. A few years later the more practitioner-focused Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) was launched and provided in Taiwan, Shanghai, various locations in Malaysia, Thailand, as well as Hong Kong, Singapore and even the very European city of Zurich, together with Adelaide, the home of UniSA. It would not be exaggerating to claim that UniSA found itself on a steep learning curve in managing the complexities of inter-agency collaboration, financial administration and supply chain management, as well as the mysteries of cross-cultural communication with a diverse range of senior business leaders.

From a policy perspective Australian university doctoral education programs are driven by the need for outcomes (Vilkinas, 2005, Wright, 2003). Successful completions enhance the reputation of the program providers and help them remain competitive. Indeed, as higher education consolidates as a business like enterprise there is a wider concern with customer satisfaction and service quality (Gatfield, 1997). Although doctoral education is firmly locked in the grip of university bureaucracy there is awareness that meeting the needs and interest of the customer, especially in the international marketplace, is an important aspect of staying in business.

These concerns of business, in which the equation between product, price, marketing and service delivery is critical to sustainability, appears to treat the whole process of managing doctoral programs like any other commodity. This rather overshadows the learning process and outcomes. Doctoral degrees are essentially about continuing professional learning and the complex process of actually starting, progressing through and successfully completing the journey, aptly described as 'The Long March', underpins all the concerns of business management and marketing.

In a policy context effectively managing the learning process and achieving successful completions is the core business of doctoral programs. This is acutely the case with experienced and senior business people, who represent an important 'critical customer' with well-tuned achievement motivation and high expectations. It may be generalized that such executive level adult learners on doctoral programs require the right kind of attention thorough good quality supervision and user-friendly customer service if their journey is to be both satisfying and successful. It is in the business interest of the providers to get things right.

The Research Focus

Using recent research findings from a recent survey of 94 doctoral graduates (PhD and DBA awards), from the Division of Business at the University of South Australia (UniSA), attention focused on two aspects of the learning journey that are of considerable interest to academics seeking successful completions and management attempting to sustain the international market for business education in an increasingly competitive environment.

The research concentrated on what happens *during* the doctoral learning journey and *after* graduation. Accordingly, the whole paper comprises two parts. The first examines the extent to which the original goals and ambitions of the graduates were realised in successfully completing the doctoral learning journey. The second examines the ways the doctoral learning outcomes were applied after graduation. To repeat, the two focal interests are of equal importance to university policy makers, marketing and administrative staff and academics ultimately responsible for the delivery of programs and the facilitation of the doctoral learning journey.

Particular attention is paid to the majority of doctoral graduates, for they represent executive level business owners and managers in a variety of industries. Furthermore they comprise an 'ideal-type' of knowledge workers depicted years ago (Reich, 1991), together with prior forecasts of the coming of post-industrial society (Bell, 1974) and more recent to contemporary commentators about the knowledge economy and the information age (Kumar, 1995, Banerjee, 2006). From a different angle they may also be described as continuing professional learners as all of them had furthered their education to the MBA level, which was accepted as the qualifying award for the doctoral programs. To a large extent they reflected Houle's early work identifying the characteristics of those engaged in continuing professional learning (1980). We shall return to this point later.

Typically, the doctoral graduates featured in this research are part-time learners with complex and demanding work schedules. Their doctoral research has to be fitted between competing demands on their time and energies. More importantly, embarking on the doctoral learning journey is a constant exposure to the risk of non-completion, which would sit awkwardly with high-drive achievers familiar with successful outcomes in their professional life.

The risk is compounded as the qualifying MBA usually does not include research skills and therefore the majority of doctoral students are grappling with new learning in becoming producers of new knowledge. Furthermore, doctoral research, especially the traditional PhD, involves higher level competency in the abstractions of theory-building and philosophizing, typically a far cry from the pragmatic and 'bottom line' thinking of doing business and management.

Three broad questions are asked: (1) why business and corporate leaders want to pursue doctoral research studies when most have reached senior positions, (2) what they actually experienced during the doctoral journey and (3) whether they applied their knowledge and learning after the formal stage of the journey was completed.

To simply answer the first question, we may characterize them as mature-age adult learners with a 'zest for continuing learning' (Houle, 1980). They are typical high-drive performers with a lifetime of achievement motivation marking out their successful careers. The second question matches their expectations with actual experiences and outcomes. Not only is it important for these adult learners to meet personal and professional needs, their successful completion is a good advertisement for the doctoral programs and a key element in sustaining a place in a competitive market. The third question deals with the application of what they knew and learned through doctoral studies. The data from the research provides insights into what the doctoral journey meant to the graduates from the 'Long March' and how they applied their knowledge and learning afterwards.

Background Literature

There are three main ways of organising the general literature that relates to the doctoral learning journey. First, the '**before**' stage, where there is interest in the motives for undertaking the "Long March" of the doctoral learning journey. Second there is the '**during**' stage; which includes the learning experience of meeting the challenges of doing research, the working relationship with supervisors, various efforts made by universities to support the process through doctoral education and training programs, and just the everyday experience of being a postgraduate student on one basis or another (full or part-time, in residence or by distance). At the centre of much of the literature is a strong focus on doctoral supervision. Third, there is the '**completion**' stage, when the focus is on what happens afterwards. The majority of studies are focused on postgraduate career decisions, many seeking employment and career development in the sciences and technology, which is hardly surprising given the strongly vocational nature of the doctorate degree in these disciplines. A select list of references is included.

What is noteworthy is the absence of attention to the doctoral learning journey undertaken by business and corporate executives, that is to say, mature age adult learners, many holding top level leadership positions across a range of knowledge-based industries. Much of the literature outlined above concentrates on younger doctoral students and graduates, doing research on a full-time basis and at the beginning of their career development. The majority of doctoral graduates in this paper could not be more different. The data reported below attempts to plug a knowledge gap.

The Research Findings

There have been a total of 259 doctoral graduations (PhD & DBA) between 1996 and 2004 (the time period of the research) with the majority from overseas, at 211 completions. The majority were scattered across South East Asia and a few much further abroad, such as Central Asia, Europe, the Middle East and the USA. There were 94 replies which made for a response rate of 40%, which is quite reasonable for on-line surveys. Of the 94 doctoral graduates 60% had earned a PhD and 40% the DBA.

Nationality of the Doctoral Graduates

The Singaporean Chinese, to distinguish them from the Chinese on the Mainland or living in Hong Kong, Malaysia or elsewhere are the majority group (37%), probably reflecting the intense emphasis placed on educational qualification and achievement in the ‘Garden City’ state. Next in numbers are the Mainland Chinese and those from Malaysia, many of whom are Chinese Malaysian, both at a little under 13% of the total. They too place high value on education and lifelong learning as a way of cultural life. The rest come from Thailand, many with ethnic Chinese origins and students with a European heritage typically working as expatriates in the Asia region for international companies.

The Gender and Age Demographics

The numbers of female doctoral graduates that responded to the survey was only 15%, that is, 14 of the total from the 94, which is not enough to venture generalisations about the female doctoral experience. Most of the doctoral graduates may be described as early middle age (41-50 years) with about the same number either approaching the mid years or just beyond them. The obvious implication is that the doctoral graduates are probably at a mid-point or later in their careers.

The Employment Positions of the Doctoral Graduates

The data below summarises the main employment positions of the doctoral graduates during the course of their studies. These positions were mostly reflective of well established careers.

Table 1: Employment Position of the Doctoral Graduates During Their Studies

Employment Position	Frequency	Percent
Business		
Owner/Chairman	8	8.5
Managing		
Director/President/VP		
Senior Manager	41	43.6
Middle Manager	14	14.9
Self Employed		
Consultant	5	5.3
Academic	20	21.3
Other	5	5.3
Total	92	98.9
Missing	1	1.1
Total	94	100.0

The data show that there are three distinct groups. The first group are represented by business and corporate managers, most of them senior in status and responsibility (representing just over 40%). A smaller sub-group is the business owners of companies (8%). Into the same broad grouping are middle managers, presumably eventually making

their career way into higher level positions (nearly 15%). For the sake of simplicity the entire group will be called ‘the managers’, representing a total of 63% of respondents. The majority in this group belong to the executive level strata in their professional and organisational careers. A much smaller second group are ‘the management consultants’ (5%). A third group are academics, representing a little over 20% of the total respondents. This is a sizeable group and expected consumers of doctoral programs with a clear and obvious need to obtain the widely recognised ‘trade qualification’ for the academic profession. Our attention is mainly on the managers.

Summary of the Main Demographics

Based on the 94 responses the majority of doctoral students and graduates are in a mid-career stage of personal and professional development and some are in the later stages of working life. There are a smaller number of doctoral graduates at an early stage of their careers, although they, like the rest, appear to have secured their futures in regular employment with definite career intentions. They are certainly not typical of younger students studying for a doctorate on a full-time basis. Indeed, it is the fact that most of the doctoral graduates did their course work and research on a part time basis, while holding down demanding jobs, that distinguishes them as adult learners doing a higher degree. It would be reasonable to go further and suggest that gaining a doctorate is either a hallmark that reflects a successful career or an important means of securing and consolidating a position before proceeding to something more senior.

Part One: An Overview on the Nature of the Doctoral Learning Journey

The literature on the doctoral learning journey emphasises the multiple nature of motivation to undertake the ‘Long March’. These findings are no different. Most of those starting out on the doctoral learning journey had in mind personal goals and ambitions that they at least hoped would result in positive outcomes. The relationship between goals and ambitions on the one hand and the outcomes of the doctoral learning experience on the other is underlined by the fact that 78 doctoral graduates (84% of the sample population) affirmed positively that personal goals had been realised. It would be fair to generalise that the majority have experienced a long educational history of continued achievement which had translated into successful professional careers. For about one third of the sample they summarised the doctoral learning experience as their highest intellectual experience in which personal goals and enhanced professional achievement had come together in a symbolically important way by earning the title of academic doctor.

The outcomes from the doctoral journey combine the intensely personal with the instrumental and extrinsic motivation to succeed. The outcomes in their various ways contributed significantly, and in a relatively short time after graduation, to personal empowerment as well as career advancement. In the world of business, and just about any industry outside education and the sciences, having a doctorate may not be a professional necessity, but most people are prepared to show respect for a solid achievement. In addition to the intrinsic reward the outcomes of completing a doctorate are mostly beneficial. Moreover, in Asian cultures with a long held respect for learning and knowledge the cultural power of a doctorate is beyond measure. In that sense being able to use the title ‘doctor’ can be worn like a badge or medal, conveying a message of social power, probably far greater than that given to Australians.

Further Personal Reflections on the Doctoral Learning Experience

Doing a doctorate is both a challenging and complex undertaking, a view well supported by the literature on the subject. In the case of UniSA doctoral candidates most begin the program with limited experience of doing research and they have to learn with little more than a vague idea of their topic. It is a challenge to think like an academic and manage the entire process of the learning journey. As frequently demonstrated in the literature, there are three main aspects to the learning journey; the academic, the intellectual and the emotional. These tend to come together in one whole experience and in practice are difficult to separate. In the table below the doctoral learning experience has more than one meaning.

Table 2: Reflections on the doctoral learning experience

Doctoral Learning Experience	Frequency	Percent
A challenge of capability and intellect	17	18.1
A learning experience	14	14.9
Acquire skills and knowledge	20	21.3
Better prospect for career	12	12.8
Sharpen thoughts	18	19.1
Academic achievement	9	9.6
Meeting friends	1	1.1
Total	91	96.8
Missing	3	3.2
Total	94	100.0

The responses provide a general interpretation of the doctoral learning experience. For instance, there is not much difference between regarding the experience as a personal challenge, to enhancing intellectual capability, as well as sharpening thoughts and acquiring knowledge and skills as they all relate to the same process of learning.

Taken together, the majority of the doctoral graduates were able to reflect on the learning journey in a positive way, notably for combining personal and professional satisfaction that resulted in a widely recognised academic qualification and the status that is conferred on becoming a doctor.

Part Two: The Application of Doctoral Learning

Each doctoral graduation represents a solution to the problem that most concerns university policy makers and program managers. From an educational perspective, however, there is a continuing interest in the extent and the ways and means doctoral graduates apply their learning after the research-based thesis or dissertation has completed the formal stages of academic examination.

The research presented an application of learning model comprising five elements: (1) the application of research-based knowledge derived from the doctoral studies, (2) using the skills from the experience of conducting research to some other purpose, (3) passing on the benefits of the overall doctoral learning experience to others in some way

or another, (4) being empowered in some personal and professional ways, and (5) capitalising on the learning journey to foster some new kinds of development, notably in 'jumpstarting' some new kind of personal, professional and/or business innovation. These five notions of applied doctoral learning move from the concrete towards the intangible and embrace both the personal and professional outcome.

The first aspect to note was the extent to which the doctoral students started to apply the knowledge they were acquiring *during* their research, to outputs beyond the official program requirements. The findings show a respectable number of doctoral students did publish from their research while it was in progress (21%). It is tangible evidence of knowledge application. This is admirable and probably indicates a particularly close and productive relationship with the supervisor and probably other qualities of personal character, as well as academic performance. However, the greater number did not publish or otherwise disseminate (51%), but it would be unfair to judge these results one way or another.

What about the evidence of the application of knowledge *after* doctoral graduation? This is the point at which there appears to be no particular expectation to apply knowledge as universities obtain no official reward, although they may claim such activity accords with desirable graduate research qualities (UniSA, 2004).

Table 3: Knowledge application after completion and graduation

Knowledge application after	Frequency	Percent
Publication	38	40.4
Conference presentation	13	13.8
Developing teaching and learning program	12	12.8
Guest speaker	2	2.1
In progress	6	6.4
Others	11	11.7
Nothing	7	7.4
Other presentations	3	3.2
Total	92	97.8
Missing	2	2.1
Total	94	100.0

The findings require a little more explanation, although it is quite evident what publication and conference presentation means. Being a guest speaker (2) meant explaining their research within the company or in response to invitations from others. Another small number (6) regarded themselves as making progress towards applying what they had learned to other forms of knowledge outcome, typically by journal publication.

Developing teaching and learning programs is a more specialised outcome, which several respondents (12) elaborated upon a little more. For one doctoral graduate it meant applying the research by converting it into a professional development curriculum for organisational training, for another a number of modules were designed that focused on integrated learning in graduate level education, and for a third it was defined as using the

knowledge material to underpin and better focus a owner-managed consultancy in business management.

As for the 'others' (11), responses covered such things as using the knowledge gained to improve product delivery processes in the employing organisation, conduct 'in-house' research, setting up a small business in private investment funds, encouraging 'start up' enterprises to expand their operations into the Asia region, introducing concepts learned from the doctoral program to various consultancy clients, making specific recommendations to improve operations on the Stock Exchange in China and Hong Kong, and investing the learning by applying the knowledge to running the family business. It is clear that with all the examples given the emphasis was on the practical application of the knowledge gained through research.

What emerges from the findings is that knowledge is usually applied to the workplace (26%), which is a reasonable expectation from the doctoral graduates as they already held significant positions in their organisations and had considerable industry experience. In practical terms knowledge application in the workplace meant such things as focusing on the enhancement of organisational development by impacting on company culture, changing human resource management policy and practice, embarking on new strategic thinking, developing a scenario analysis tool, implementing an interactive staff training program and by other ways and means setting out to improve the competitive edge of the company.

Another sizeable group (19%) appeared to be aiming their knowledge transfer in the direction of academic life, notably through research presentation and publication. This is also evident in the number (9) who had already taken on academic activities such as research supervision, mentoring and examining on a part-time basis.

What follows in pursuit of a slightly deeper understanding of the knowledge application theme are the reflections the doctoral graduates felt able to make about what it meant in a personal and professional way. These go further than instrumental-functional activities to the application of the doctoral journey in a more general and expressive way.

The Application of Research-Based Skills From Doctoral Studies

The figures below (table 4) show that the greatest meaning was attached to the actual intellectual achievement (36%), not necessarily the application of the knowledge that sprang from the doctoral research topic. But others had a more applied focus as to what knowledge application entailed, such as addressing practical problems through research-based knowledge and providing critical insights into the analysis of problems. Thus the PhD, in the experience of one respondent, provided him with the cognitive tools for approaching workplace and organisational problems in a more systematic way using the research knowledge for leverage to change practices. Critical thinking took him beyond surface analysis and the research knowledge filled the gap in the understanding of a particular organisational problem.

Table 4: The application of research-based skills

Methods of application	Frequency	Percent
Publication	17	18.1
Conference presentation	7	7.4
Supervision	14	14.9
In progress	12	12.8
Coaching	17	18.1
Nothing at this stage	8	8.5
Apply knowledge at work	14	14.9
Total	89	94.7
Missing	5	5.3
Total	94	100.0

The figures above show some overlap between knowledge and skill application, notably in the numbers reporting that the research-based skills that they had either acquired or extended in the doctoral program found their expression through publication and conference presentation. This is simple to explain as in both modes of knowledge dissemination it is usual to explain, justify and defend the research design and methods used, which has often entailed a good deal of new learning and skill acquisition. A case in point would be a PhD graduate who learned for the first time both the theory and the practical application of the Delphi method, which was then applied with excellent results in the thesis research and continued into journal publication afterwards.

The two aspects of skill application reveal themselves more explicitly in the activities of research supervision and academic coaching (15% and 19% respectively). For example, some respondents had taken up the supervision of other doctoral students (including the UniSA DBA program), which typically involves a good deal on coaching and application of research skills. Another designed a complete PhD program focused on Human Resource Management for his university. Others were heavily involved in giving guidance on design and methods to undergraduates, most notably on action learning research.

Direct application to the workplace is also illustrated (15%). In one example a doctoral graduate used recent research skills to change workplace practices in her company, another reported applying research skills to fine tune an international marketing strategy and a third applied specific skills used in his thesis to improve financial analysis methods. A couple of management consultants reported using research skills to enhance presentations to clients and gaining more authority in the process.

The Application of the Overall Doctoral Learning Experience

In a narrow sense the meaning of learning experience can be confined to the technical aspects of conceiving, planning, implementing, analysing and writing the doctoral research through to completion after examination. The extra aspect is that the benefits can be transferred to others in a helpful way. The findings are in summary form below.

Table 5: The application of the overall learning experience

Application of Learning Experience	Frequency	Percent
Sharing research findings, literature review	22	23.4
Sharing research experience and dealing with the pitfalls and problems encountered	18	19.1
Advice/encouragement on studies	42	44.7
Supervision and assistance	7	7.4
Nothing at this stage	4	4.3
Total	92	97.9
Missing	2	2.1
Total	94	100.0

What the figures show is that sharing the learning experience, in one way or another, is the main way skill is interpreted. What is passed on is personal insight, drawn from direct experience, that academic research is intellectually rigorous and demanding, with no short cut to the learning required for doctoral level studies. One graduate identified that learning to write a comprehensive literature review and linking it to the research idea and design is a demanding experience but essential to a successful outcome. The same applies to using abstract concepts as a foundation for the research as another important learning experience to pass onto others. Another stressed the importance of developing a conceptual ‘road map’ for the research early in the process as a key element in the learning experience to transfer on to other learners. Yet another went back to an even earlier stage in the research process, which was to be clear about what it was the doctoral student wanted to know, that is, the core research problem. It was for him the most profound part of his learning experience which he felt compelled to pass on to other researchers. A final illustration comes from one doctoral graduate who learned much about the different paradigms of research knowledge and how important it was to grasp these at the formative stage of the research process.

Each in different but complementary ways were the lessons of learning to teach or guide others into appreciating as they grappled with the research process. Together the message from the doctoral graduates was that the lessons they had learnt should be available for others to take account and avoid some of the pitfalls and costly mistakes in the research process.

A different angle of the learning experience and applying what was understood to others reflected more on the emotional side of the doctoral journey, particularly the need for persistence, tenacity and single minded determination over the distance of the “Long March”. It was recognised that all doctoral students needed regular encouragement and personal support, for it is not just an academic and intellectual experience but also an intensely personal journey, largely taken alone. One respondent stressed the importance of living a balanced life, with ample physical exercise and a good diet, to offset the long hours studying. Finally, a PhD graduate claimed that he was able to pass on the benefit of his doctoral learning experience in helping his son with his graduate research.

The Outcome of Personal Empowerment Arising From the Doctoral Learning Journey

This outcome theme is the most elusive of the five and rests very much on personal perception and interpretation. Below are the main findings summarised to reflect some main clusters of the empowerment experience.

Table 6: Personal empowerment arising from the doctoral learning experience

Evidence of Personal Growth	Frequency	Percent
Positive self development	31	33.0
Gain credibility, respect and trust	14	14.9
Enhance skills and sharpen thoughts	5	5.3
Promotion/get a job/ better career prospect	14	14.9
Publications	8	8.5
Nothing at this stage	14	14.9
Total	86	91.5
Missing	8	8.5
Total	94	100.0

The idea of personal empowerment has several meanings. It is easy for academics to underestimate the power of getting one’s research published, yet for (8 or 9%) respondents it meant a great deal to them, as did the honing of analytical and critical thinking skills (just over 5%). Others (14 or 16%) regarded empowerment as about career enhancement, which in the context of doing a doctorate makes good sense. The largest group (36%) regarded empowerment in more expected terms, that is to say, as a personal experience. Not to be overlooked is the finding that empowerment was regarded more in terms of gaining credibility, respect and trust for some respondents (14 or 16%). This makes sense almost anywhere but especially in the Asian context where high educational status carries considerable recognition in the wider community.

With reference to the credibility and respect theme, it was interpreted as enhancing business dealings, achieving recognition from colleagues (peers as well as senior staff) and more generally as an acknowledgement of a demonstration of ability. For the academics it had a direct link with career advancement, including some that aspired to work in the university sector.

Not everyone felt any particular benefit to be empowered about. Explanations included the expected one that the benefits, beyond the personal sense of achievement, had not yet appeared as it was too soon after graduation to realise much gain. Another claimed he was too old to relate empowerment to career opportunity, so was content to treat the outcomes in purely personal terms.

The Creation of Professional, Occupational and Business Opportunities Arising From Doctoral Studies

It can be quickly seen that the fifth application of learning theme captures just about everything else. Its intention was to narrow the focus to ‘start up’ or ‘jumpstart’ business opportunities or innovation that could lead into something beyond the doctorate, with the learning acting as a catalyst for new developments.

Table 7: The ‘jumpstart’ provided by the doctoral journey

The Jumpstart provided by the Doctoral Journey	Frequency	Percent
To a great extent	39	41.5
To a certain extent	23	24.5
Very limited	10	10.6
Nothing at this stage	17	18.1
Total	89	94.7
Missing	5	5.3
Total	94	100.0

From these results it is not proven that gaining a doctorate provided a significant ‘jumpstart’ for new business opportunities. Instead, respondents were more inclined to mention other things covered elsewhere that were not directly related to the business development idea. This is not to deny that for some new ideas and opportunities were sought and found, either deliberately or partly by happenstance. And there is always the future where a connection might be made between the outcomes of the doctoral journey and the process of innovation and new business development. This thought points out a future research direction with a longitudinal approach.

In spite of this somewhat muted conclusion there are three different examples, drawn from the actual experiences of two PhDs and a DBA graduate, connecting to the ‘jumpstart’ and innovation idea.

The first is the case of a successful business owner who decided to use the doctorate as a catalyst for personal change. In his case he sold his share of the business and set off in a new direction writing a book on a completely unrelated topic to his thesis, which gained immediate newsworthy publicity and many invitations to give public presentations to a wide range of interest groups. In short, he reinvented himself and found new outlets for his lateral thinking skills as well as business acumen.

The second example is a PhD student in Hong Kong whose research, using the action learning approach, began a process of product innovation and change management in a family business that quickly gained momentum and a return on investment well in excess of expectations. In other words, the actual research for the thesis was the ‘jumpstart’ for a fresh beginning in a business that was slowly going stale and uncompetitive in the Hong Kong and China markets. There is another illustration of a similar kind in Hong Kong where the DBA research stimulated new business thinking and the wholesale adoption of a continuous innovation management strategy in the company, which specialized in a popular but risky ‘fad business’. In these two examples the two Chinese doctoral graduates well and truly remained faithful to their business and company commitments,

leading and innovating from within the respective organization. It may be argued that the doctoral programs provided the platform for such innovative business developments.

Summary of the Application of Learning

The findings show, not unexpectedly given the character and active lives of the doctoral graduates, that there is evidence of a good deal of application of learning in the five ways identified, although less clearly in the 'jumpstart' dimension than might have been hoped. The findings also indicate that application of learning embraces the personal as well as the professional domain, which broadens the concept beyond a narrow form of instrumental outcome.

A fitting closure to the whole enterprise of the doctoral learning journey as an application process is well expressed by a PhD graduate who explained, "*The doctorate should act as a spring-board to future endeavors but it would largely depend on the incumbent. The PhD gives you the key. It is up to you to open the door. It is only the beginning of a long unending journey with no destination. Having a destination would only dampen our excitement and imagination*". This statement contains much about the character of mind of the doctoral graduate successfully undertaking continuing professional learning.

Conclusion

There are two kinds of implication arising from the findings. The first is to make a link with conceptual writing about continuing professional learning (CPL), notably the work of a well-known American adult educator (Cyril Houle, 1913-1998). The second is to discuss what the data specifically dealing with doctoral graduates with high standing as business leaders and senior managers implies for the provision of programs designed for this significant market in executive education.

The Conceptual Connection

Like most adult educators Houle sought an understanding of the motivation to continue learning and identified three main kinds: (1) goal-orientated learners, (2) activity-based or social learners seeking a means to engage in relationships with others, and (3) those seeking learning primarily for intrinsic satisfaction.

Goal-orientated learning is the most obvious motivation relevant to doctoral studies. The desire to acquire vocational and professional knowledge and skills provides the main reason to undertake the journey. However, as the evidence showed, the power of intrinsic rewards and enhanced social status cannot be ignored.

The work of Houle also identified three modes of adult learning, which have a varied relationship to doctoral education: (1) the mode of *inquiry*, (2) the mode of *instruction*, and (3), the mode of *performance*.

The mode of inquiry obviously marries with the doctoral research process; everything from the basic conception through all the stages to the final throes of completion after examination, largely on a self-directed basis as the independent adult learner. The instruction mode takes in the process of learning about research methods and the difficult task of making an acceptable proposal. It is sometimes necessary to give instruction or direction as there is some mystery on the road to mastery of the research

process. As an example, there is no short cut to getting to grips with the literature and incorporating the received knowledge into a discourse with the research. Nor can there be an easy way to learn how to use advanced statistical techniques as a first time learner and everyone struggles with writing a thesis or dissertation. With these struggles it is perfectly normal to seek advice and submit to instruction for those that have the know-how. As for the mode of performance, doctoral studies come down to producing new knowledge and developing an academic mindset to achieve the desired outcomes, which has to pass through the rigours of peer-review and examination. It is quite common for the student to have to make revisions to the research, which can be a painful experience and a test of the capacity to perform to an exacting level, sometimes after it was hoped and believed the journey was over, at last.

Houle's classification, although somewhat dated in years still faithfully reflects the 'zest for continuing professional learning' which he identified. It is a reasonable claim that the doctoral graduates described in this paper are *goal-orientated* adult learners who continue to apply the knowledge they had diligently researched, often to their own workplace and organisational context. The *mode of inquiry* they had embraced by doing research had created new knowledge, not just information but also insight and interpretation that could be applied to address business and management problems. Moreover, doctoral graduates are trained in the mindset and actions of the *mode of performance*.

Although most would be content to define themselves as *pacesetters*, in Houle's terms, a few are true *innovators*, by using research-based knowledge to 'think outside the box' and use their new learning as a change driver in often complex business environments. All of this is essentially about the application of learning and doctoral graduates by continuing their professional education to a high level reflect the Graduate Research Qualities profile of the University of South Australia.

Houle's work has been confirmed in a recent study, which explored knowledge-seeking behaviour among broadly comparable professional continuing learners (Jensen, 2007). Her paper is more complex in its theory-building yet largely identifies the instrumental and emotional motives for CPL, although her sample groups represented other kinds of professional workers than the business executive (accountants, computer engineers, nurses and teachers).

The connection between CPL and the application of learning theme explored in the research on doctoral graduates shows a close fit. This might be reasonably expected of the kind of adult learners drawn to the demanding process of generating new knowledge, acquiring research skills and more generally upgrading their overall professional competence. Houle produced a good framework of ideas about the nature of CPL that the doctoral graduates of today provide practical expression. Expressed in a complementary way, the doctoral graduates described in the research may be identified as exemplars of the modern-day knowledge work, with most of them deeply engaged in competitive business activity in a constantly changing environment. The advanced level learning of the doctorate certainly enhances their performance by providing a new level of competency and self-confidence that can be applied and adapted to other situations.

The Policy and Practice Context

Quite often the doctoral graduates made remarks to the effect that the learning journey was their highest academic and intellectual achievement. A significant number of

respondents identified the importance of the supervisor in providing both the technical expertise and the personal support throughout the doctoral journey. This is recognized in the official reports in Australia and it would be fair to generalize that at the university level serious attention is paid to getting the best fit between doctoral student and supervisor. This is supported by various training programs to raise awareness of the complexities and competency levels required of supervisors. Such programs are often policy driven. There is need for more learning derived from the 'inside' stories of doctoral graduates. As successful finishers and customers their learning and other needs provide the raw material for improving the service quality mindset within the ranks of university staff.

Academic supervisors have a key role to play in enabling doctoral students actively plan for the application of their learning after their studies are formally completed. This encouragement may support the motivation to complete the 'Long March'. For doctoral program managers they can better understand the importance of taking a long-term view of the learning journey and to lend support to the dissemination process and the values and practices of CPL. For other university staff involved in doctoral education programs they too should appreciate that graduates often play an influential role, not only within their industry environment but in the wider community. They are potentially ideal members of university alumni and the best form of positive advertisement.

There is more to these matters than just advocating a form of personal and professional behaviour. The way these 'executive' level doctoral students are managed by the university, both as customers and mature adult learners, is integral to the sustainability of such energetically marketed programs. In that regard there still seems much to learn in organisational terms. Too often university administration lapses into treating doctoral students like typical undergraduates and 'talking down', ignoring their high status and cultural sensitivities. Such concerns also apply to academic supervision, notably when it becomes removed from the role of 'guide, philosopher and friend' (based on a Chinese saying).

In noting some of the shortfalls between what is claimed about the value of graduate knowledge in a changing society through sophisticated marketing and what actually happens on the doctoral journey there is always going to a need for organisational learning to close the gap between rhetoric and reality. In that regard there is much to learn from the experiences of doctoral graduates.

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Appendix: The research questions first, some factual information:

- A1. In what year did you graduate?
- A2. What was your age when you graduated?
- A3. Where was your doctoral program located?
- A4. During the period of your doctoral studies, how would you describe your employment position?
- A5. Are you male or female?
- A6. What is your Nationality?

Secondly, please provide some details of your research topic:

- B1. In what broad knowledge area would your research most comfortably fit?
- B2. If you managed to publish from your doctoral work before it was examined and passed provide a brief summary.
- B3. Did you do anything else to use your research in your professional or personal life while you were studying? What did you do?

Your original goal and ambition in relation to your doctoral studies

- C1. Have your academic/professional goals and ambitions been realised through your doctoral studies?
- C2. Briefly explain what you wanted the doctoral experience to mean to you.
- C3. Briefly explain what you wanted a successful outcome to do for you.

The core research themes and questions

The following themes refer to five key features of the doctoral research process, with each having a number of related questions. What I want to understand is what kinds of **application** has taken place since completion, that is to say, from the whole process of doing doctoral research to what happens afterwards to the knowledge, skills and learning experiences you had and may have subsequently applied in your professional and personal life. What the questions that follow seek to find is whether there are self-perceived, tangible links between various aspects of your doctoral learning journey (expressed as the five themes noted above) and your subsequent professional and personal development.

Theme 1: the application of specialised knowledge from your doctoral research

- D1. What have you done with the knowledge you produced for your doctoral research?
- D2. What else have you done to apply your doctoral research knowledge?
- D3. What insights would you like to make about the pure and applied value of the knowledge you produced in your doctoral research after graduation?

Theme 2: the application of research-based skills from your doctoral studies **Question on factual information**

- E1. What have you done with the research skills and knowledge you developed for your doctoral research?
- E2. What insights would you like to make about applying the research skills and knowledge you developed in your doctoral research after graduation?

Theme 3: the application of learning experience arising from your doctoral studies

- F1. What aspects of the doctoral learning process as a personal experience have you been able to pass on to others?
- F2. How significant was your learning experience in doing the doctorate? To what extent have you been able to continue to apply the doctoral learning experience to other situations?

Theme 4: the experience of personal empowerment arising from your doctoral studies

- G1. What evidence can you produce to show that the personal growth that took place while doing the doctorate has made you feel more empowered in your professional and personal life?
- G2. Apart from how others have perceived you after gaining the doctorate, what have you felt about yourself?

Theme 5: the creation of professional, occupational and business opportunities arising from your doctoral studies

H1. In your assessment, to what extent have achieving doctoral status, as well as the actual knowledge and skills you acquired, connected with any subsequent business and career opportunities, either directly or indirectly?

H2. Looking back to what extent did you consider that doing a doctorate might provide a kind of platform or jumpstart for further opportunities in your professional and personal life?

In conclusion: looking back at the experience of the “Long March”

J1. What for you were the most memorable aspects of your doctoral journey?

J2. To what extent have your original motives for doing a doctorate been satisfied by personal and professional outcomes after graduation?

Final reflections

K1. What else could you write about the professional and personal outcomes you have experienced since gaining your doctorate?